

# News Release

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For Immediate Release  
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Contact: Roy  
Stearns  
Dep. Director of  
Communications  
(916) 654-7538

Contact: Alex Peabody  
Aquatic Safety Specialist  
(831) 649-7132

**Have FUN, but think SAFETY!**

## **State Park Lifeguards Prepare For Spring Crowds, Urge Safety First**

April showers are nearing their end and California State Parks is preparing for a dramatic increase in the numbers of visitors to its 278 park units as warm weather and sunny skies begin to settle in.

“Our intention here is to alert the public and ask for their help in making this a safe spring in our parks, “ said California State Parks Deputy Director for Operations Ted Jackson.

In visitor surveys, one of the primary reasons for visiting parks has something to do with water. Whether passively recreating by walking along a beach, or viewing California's spectacular coastline, or more actively recreating by surfing, swimming, fishing, or boating--park visitors love the water.

“Spring can be a particularly dangerous time for aquatic recreation in California State Parks,” warns Alex Peabody, Aquatic Safety Specialist for the Department. Along the coast the dangers can include:

- Colder water temperatures in the ocean--temperatures in the low to mid fifty degrees are common from Southern to Northern California.
- Large, rough surf conditions.
- Strong powerful rip currents due to the uneven ocean bottom from the winter storms.
- Fewer on-duty lifeguards in the spring than in the summer.

In the lakes, reservoirs, and rivers that flow through California State Parks:

- Very cold water temperatures from snow melt and spring rains.
- Fluctuating water levels due to water releases from the dams and increases in water run-off from melting snows.
- Very high river flows from run-off.

Rescue statistics compiled by the Department for calendar year 2005 show that State Park Lifeguards and Rangers performed a total of 5,827 water rescues. “The majority of those rescues were accomplished by our seasonal lifeguard staff,” said Peabody. During this period, there were 24 drownings; however, records show that none of the drownings occurred in guarded water areas.

“Clearly, keeping people in guarded water areas works,” said Peabody. “The United States Lifesaving Association estimates that the chances of drowning a beach with lifeguards on duty to be less than 1 in 18 million. With current spring conditions and summer quickly approaching, our first priority will be to continue to educate the public about water safety and direct park visitors to areas where lifeguard service will be provided.”

“Drowning continues to be the leading cause of accidental death in our state parks,” said Peabody. According to the Department fatality statistics, drowning accounted for 45% of accidental deaths in California State Parks in 2005.

“The key to reversing this trend is prevention,” adds Peabody. “At the most fundamental level, it is the lifeguard’s mission to prevent drowning accidents. Through public education that includes informational news releases, warning signs, interpretive panels, brochures, and programs such as the very popular Junior Lifeguard programs offered at a number of state parks; combined with the efforts of our existing lifeguard programs we hope to increase the aquatic safety of visitors to California’s State Parks.”

Peabody reminds park visitors that the first person responsible for safety is you. “Have fun, but think safety.”

For more information on aquatic safety in California State Parks, visit:

[www.parks.ca.gov/aquaticsafety](http://www.parks.ca.gov/aquaticsafety)

## Key Public Safety Message for a Safe Aquatic Recreation:

**Park officials encourage the public to pay close attention to safety signs as they enter the park or access beaches. Swim directly in front of staffed lifeguard towers, where they are available. Contact your local state park office to learn the locations of the safest swimming areas.**

### Aquatic Safety Recommendations:

**Learn how to swim!**

#### **When you are at the beach:**

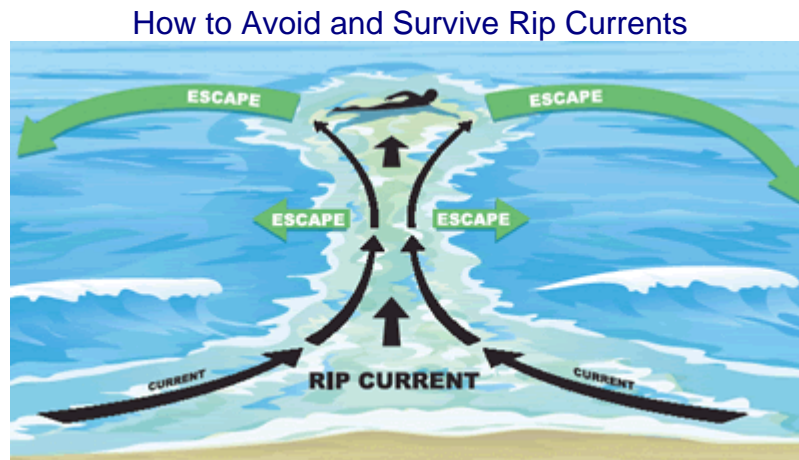
1. Whenever possible, **swim at a lifeguard-protected beach.**
2. Never swim alone.
3. Learn how to swim in the surf. It's not the same as swimming in a pool or lake.
4. Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches. If in doubt, don't go out. Never dive in head first. If caught in a rip current, remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly. Don't fight the current. Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
5. Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards. Lifeguards are trained to identify potential hazards. Ask a lifeguard about the conditions before entering the water. This is part of their job.
6. Stay at least 100 feet away from piers and jetties. Permanent rip currents often exist alongside these structures.
7. Consider using polarized sunglasses when at the beach. They will help you to spot signatures of rip currents by cutting down glare and reflected sunlight off the ocean's surface. Wear your sunscreen and hat.
8. Pay especially close attention to children and elderly when at the beach. Even in shallow water, wave action can cause loss of footing.
9. Water and alcohol don't mix! Never swim after consuming alcohol or drugs.
10. When boating, always wear a personal flotation device.

If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call **9-1-1**. Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. **Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.**

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The following diagram and information on Rip Currents courtesy of the USLA and NOAA

For more information on Rip Currents, go to [www.usla.org](http://www.usla.org)



- Never swim alone.
- Be cautious at all times, especially when swimming at unguarded beaches. If in doubt, don't go out!
- Whenever possible, swim at a lifeguard protected beach.
- Obey all instructions and orders from lifeguards.
- If caught in a rip current, remain calm to conserve energy and think clearly.
- Don't fight the current. Swim out of the current in a direction following the shoreline. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are unable to swim out of the rip current, float or calmly tread water. When out of the current, swim towards shore.
- If you are still unable to reach shore, draw attention to yourself: face the shore, wave your arms, and yell for help.
- If you see someone in trouble, get help from a lifeguard. If a lifeguard is not available, have someone call 9-1-1. Throw the rip current victim something that floats and yell instructions on how to escape. **Remember, many people drown while trying to save someone else from a rip current.**